

The Impact of Contextual Authentic Materials on Reading Comprehension among Vocational High School Learners.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of using contextual authentic materials in improving vocational high school (SMK) students' reading comprehension and motivation in learning English reading. The research was conducted among tenth-grade hospitality students at SMK Negeri 2 Polewali during the 2025/2026 academic year. Using a quasi-experimental nonequivalent control group design, 42 students were randomly assigned to experimental (n = 21) and control (n = 21) groups. The experimental group was taught using contextual authentic materials, such as hotel advertisements, reservation forms, tourism brochures, and workplace memos—while the control group received conventional textbook-based instruction over six sessions within five weeks. Data were collected through pretests and posttests consisting of 20 multiple-choice items measuring four sub-skills: identifying main ideas, recognizing supporting details, making inferences, and interpreting references. Statistical analyses using SPSS version 26 included descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and inferential analyses (ANCOVA and independent-samples t-test). The results revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group significantly, $F(1, 39) = 26.48$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .40$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.62$). Students exposed to contextual authentic materials demonstrated greater gains across all sub-skills, with the highest improvement in inference-making. Classroom observations further indicated that these materials enhanced students' engagement and motivation by linking classroom learning to real-world professional contexts. The findings affirm that contextual authentic materials are effective in fostering both cognitive and affective outcomes in vocational English learning. They enable students to connect language learning with their future careers, promoting meaningful, relevant, and motivated reading comprehension. Consequently, English teachers and curriculum developers in vocational schools are encouraged to integrate authentic vocational texts into instruction to bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace communication.

Keywords: Contextual Authentic Materials, Reading Comprehension, Vocational High School Students

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

May 24, 2025

Revised

November 05,
2025

Accepted

December 02, 2025

Published by
Website

E-ISSN

Copyright



Institut Agama Islam Ma'arif NU (IAIMNU) Metro Lampung
<https://journal.iaimnumetrolampung.ac.id/index.php/ji/index>
2548-7892

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English in vocational high schools (SMK) aims not only to equip students with the ability to communicate in English, both orally and in written form, but also to prepare them to understand vocationally relevant texts such as workplace manuals, hotel brochures, business correspondence, or product descriptions. However, many Indonesian vocational students continue to struggle with reading comprehension despite years of English instruction (Astuti & Lestari, 2020; Wello & Dollah, 2008b). This difficulty indicates that

mastering reading comprehension at the SMK level requires not only repeated exposure but also the integration of instructional strategies and materials that are contextual, authentic, and directly aligned with students' future professional environments (Wello & Dollah, 2008a). Recent research highlights the importance of using authentic materials texts created for real-life communication rather than pedagogical purposes to enhance learners' motivation and comprehension (Lin et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2013). In vocational education, contextual authentic materials refer to real-world texts that reflect specific professional domains, such as hotel job descriptions, tourism leaflets, reservation forms, or business advertisements, selected for their relevance to students' majors. Prior studies have demonstrated the benefits of authentic materials in general EFL settings (Gilmore, 2007; Mishan & Timmis, 2015), yet empirical evidence in Indonesian vocational high schools (SMK), especially quasi-experimental studies examining their impact on reading comprehension within hospitality and tourism programs, is still limited. This lack of focused, context-specific evidence constrains our understanding of how authentic vocational materials foster deeper comprehension processes such as inference-making, schemata activation, and knowledge transfer (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Hosseini et al., 2025). (Surahmat et al., 2025) emphasize that effective foreign language acquisition requires learning environments that are engaging, meaningful, and developmentally responsive. Although their review focuses on early childhood contexts, the underlying principle, that learners internalize language more successfully when instructional strategies activate interest, connect to real-life contexts, and provide meaningful exposure is highly relevant to vocational education. Their conclusion that language learning improves when learners interact with materials that are experientially rich and contextually grounded reinforces the argument that SMK students also need materials that mirror authentic communicative situations (Matsuda, 2021).

In the Indonesian context, the English curriculum for vocational high schools is designed to develop both general communicative competence and occupational English proficiency (Kemendikbud, 2018). However, in practice, the instructional materials used in many SMKs remain generic, decontextualized, and dominated by textbook-driven exercises that fail to reflect the language demands of real workplace communication (Rahmawati & Nur, 2022). This gap often results in students' limited ability to interpret and apply information found in authentic vocational texts. When learners are not exposed to materials that connect directly to their professional aspirations, their engagement and motivation decline, leading to a surface-level understanding rather than deep comprehension (Mitchell et al., 2015; Munárriz & Rincón, 2025).

Authentic materials, when integrated meaningfully, serve as cognitive and affective bridges between classroom learning and workplace realities. They provide learners with exposure to natural linguistic features such as discourse structures, vocabulary, and pragmatic functions that are often absent from contrived textbook passages. Studies by (Gilmore, 2007; Taye & Teshome, 2025; Yan et al., 2024) have shown that authentic materials significantly increase learner motivation, because students perceive the materials as useful and relevant to real-world communication. Similarly, (Walld & Winlund, 2025) argue that contextualized literacy instruction empowers learners with limited academic backgrounds to construct meaning from workplace-related texts by activating their prior knowledge and life experiences. In vocational English teaching, these materials not only develop reading comprehension but also cultivate employability skills such as information processing, task analysis, and professional communication.

Furthermore, the theoretical basis for employing contextual authentic materials can be explained through constructivist and sociocultural perspectives. Constructivism views learning as the active construction of knowledge through meaningful engagement with authentic stimuli (Bruner, 1996; Bryman, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). When students interact with real-world texts, they activate prior schemata, negotiate meaning collaboratively, and internalize language as a tool for thinking and doing. From a sociocultural standpoint, authentic materials situate learning within the learners' social and professional contexts, thereby transforming the classroom into a simulation of real communicative environments (Ngo, 2018). This perspective

aligns closely with vocational education's competency-based approach, which emphasizes performance, relevance, and transferability of learning outcomes (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of contextual authentic materials on the reading comprehension of vocational high school (SMK) students, particularly those in the hospitality department of SMK Negeri 2 Polewali during the 2025/2026 academic year. The study seeks to fill the empirical gap by examining how exposure to authentic vocational texts enhances students' comprehension and motivation compared to traditional textbook-based instruction. Specifically, this research addresses the following questions:

1. Does the use of contextual authentic materials significantly improve the reading comprehension of SMK students compared to conventional materials?
2. How does the use of contextual authentic materials influence students' motivation in learning English reading?

This investigation employs a quasi-experimental design with a control group receiving traditional instruction and an experimental group exposed to contextual authentic materials. The materials used in the intervention were derived from real hospitality contexts, such as online booking forms, hotel reviews, check-in dialogues, and promotional leaflets, adapted to match students' proficiency levels while preserving their authenticity (Fraenkel et al., 2019; Urquhart & Weir, 1998).

The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by providing empirical support for integrating contextual authentic materials into vocational English teaching and by offering teachers a concrete model for developing relevant, motivating, and meaningful reading instruction in Indonesian SMKs (Al-Tarawneh & Osam, 2019). Theoretically, this study extends existing EFL research by situating authentic material use within a vocational framework, demonstrating how authentic literacy practices shape comprehension and motivation among learners with specific career orientations (Alavi-Nia & Mozaffari, 2014; Basturkmen, 2010; Chan, 2022). Practically, it provides actionable insights for teachers and curriculum developers to design materials that reflect workplace discourse and communicative needs, thus bridging the gap between classroom instruction and industry expectations. Ultimately, incorporating contextual authentic materials in vocational English teaching not only enhances reading comprehension but also fosters learner autonomy, professional identity, and readiness for global communication in the tourism and hospitality industry.

METHOD

The teaching of English in vocational high schools (SMK) aims not only to equip students with the ability to communicate in English, both orally and in written form, but also to prepare them to understand vocationally relevant texts such as workplace manuals, hotel brochures, business correspondence, or product descriptions (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Heffner, 2023; Richards & Schmidt, 2013). However, many Indonesian vocational students continue to struggle with reading comprehension despite years of English instruction (Handayani & Dewi, 2022; Rahmawati & Nur, 2022; Sugiyono, 2014). This difficulty indicates that mastering reading comprehension at the SMK level requires not only repeated exposure but also the integration of instructional strategies and materials that are contextual, authentic, and directly aligned with students' future professional environments (T. D. Cook & Campbell, 1979; Nunan, 1999; Snow, 2002).

Recent research underscores the importance of using authentic materials, texts created for real-life communication rather than pedagogical purposes to enhance learners' motivation and comprehension (Berardo, 2006; Gilmore, 2007; Peacock, 1997; Tomlinson, 2013). In vocational education, contextual authentic materials refer to real-world texts that reflect specific professional domains, such as hotel job descriptions, tourism leaflets, reservation forms, or business advertisements (Bautista & Gutierrez, 2020; Yashnikova, 2022). Prior studies in general EFL contexts have demonstrated the benefits of authentic materials (Mishan & Timmis, 2015; Song & Sardegna, 2014; Taslimah et al., 2025), yet empirical evidence in Indonesian vocational high schools (SMK), especially quasi-experimental studies examining their impact on reading comprehension within hospitality and tourism programs, remains limited (Utami

et al., 2023; Wello & Dollah, 2008b). This lack of focused, context-specific evidence constrains our understanding of how authentic vocational materials foster deeper comprehension processes such as inference-making, schemata activation, and knowledge transfer (Anderson, n.d.; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Taye & Teshome, 2025; Walld & Winlund, 2025; Zhai et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of contextual authentic materials on the reading comprehension of vocational high school (SMK) students, particularly those in the hospitality department of SMK Negeri 2 Polewali during the 2025/2026 academic year. The study seeks to fill the empirical gap by examining how exposure to authentic vocational texts enhances students' comprehension and motivation compared to traditional textbook-based instruction (Amumpuni et al., 2025; Surahmat et al., 2025; Tompkins, 2006)

Research Design

This research adopts a positivist paradigm with a quantitative approach, as it emphasizes the measurement and analysis of observable data through statistical procedures (Creswell, 2010; Creswell & Guetterman, 2021). Within this paradigm, a quasi-experimental method was employed, specifically a nonequivalent control group design, because random assignment of individual students was not feasible in the school setting (Gay et al., 2006). Two intact classes were selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups.

The design of this research can be illustrated as follows:

Group	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
Experimental	O ₁	X (Contextual Authentic Materials)	O ₂
Control	O ₃	C (Conventional Method)	O ₄

Where:

- O₁ and O₃ = Pretest scores of experimental and control groups
- X = Treatment using contextual authentic materials
- C = Conventional teaching method
- O₂ and O₄ = Posttest scores of experimental and control groups

Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised all tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 2 Polewali during the 2025/2026 academic year. The sampling procedure employed a cluster random sampling technique, in which two intact classes were randomly selected from the list of all tenth-grade classes using a simple lottery method. The two selected classes were then randomly assigned by means of a coin flip to serve as the experimental group and the control group (Cohen et al., 2020). Each class initially consisted of 36 students; however, after applying attendance and eligibility criteria, including full participation and informed consent, 21 students from each class were retained for the final sample, resulting in a total of 42 participants (n = 42), comprising 21 students in the experimental group and 21 students in the control group.

This sampling approach was chosen to ensure that the participants represented the actual learning conditions of vocational English classrooms, where instruction typically occurs in intact groups rather than in individually randomized settings. Cluster random sampling also minimized the risk of contamination between groups, as each class followed its respective learning treatment under distinct instructional circumstances. Such a design enhances ecological validity and reflects the authentic context of English teaching in Indonesian vocational high schools.

All participants were students majoring in the Hospitality Accommodation program, which emphasizes English for professional purposes such as guest interaction, reservation handling, and tourism-related communication. Their inclusion was particularly relevant because reading comprehension plays a vital role in understanding authentic vocational texts such as hotel brochures, guest correspondence, and workplace manuals. Prior to the

intervention, both groups were verified to have comparable proficiency levels through a pretest, ensuring that any observed posttest differences could be attributed primarily to the treatment rather than preexisting disparities in ability (Miller et al., 2020).

In addition to academic considerations, ethical standards were upheld throughout the sampling and data collection process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and allowed to withdraw at any point without penalty (Flick, 2018). The school administration granted formal permission, and parental consent was obtained for all students under 18 years of age. These procedures ensured that the study complied with institutional and research ethics guidelines, thereby reinforcing the reliability and integrity of the data collected.

Furthermore, demographic data including age, gender distribution, and prior exposure to English were recorded to provide a clearer description of the sample characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Kemendikbud RI, 2021). Such information supports a more accurate interpretation of the results and allows potential replication in similar vocational contexts. By maintaining methodological rigor in participant selection, randomization, and ethical compliance, the study ensures the validity and generalizability of its findings to broader vocational English learning environments.

Instrument of the Research

The main instrument used in this study was a reading comprehension test consisting of 20 multiple-choice items designed to measure four specific sub-skills: (1) identifying main ideas (5 items), (2) recognizing supporting details (5 items), (3) making inferences (5 items), and (4) interpreting references (5 items) (Alderson, 2000; Hughes, n.d.; Kintsch, 1998; Nation, 2009). Each correct response was awarded one point, while incorrect responses were scored zero, with the total score subsequently converted into a 0–100 scale.

Validity and reliability of the instrument were established through multiple procedures. Content validity was evaluated by three experts in TESOL and vocational English, who assessed the test for clarity, relevance, and representativeness. The resulting Content Validity Index (CVI) was 0.86, indicating a high level of validity. Reliability was confirmed through a pilot study involving 30 students from a parallel class, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, which demonstrated acceptable internal consistency. Further item analysis showed that all test items met acceptable standards for difficulty index (0.35–0.70) and discrimination index (≥ 0.30), with two items revised based on expert feedback.

The treatment variable (X) in this study was the use of contextual authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension. Contextual authentic materials are defined as real-world vocational texts originally produced for professional communication rather than for pedagogical purposes, such as hotel reservation forms, travel brochures, restaurant menus, workplace memos, and tourism advertisements. These materials were selected based on four main criteria: (1) vocational relevance to the hospitality and tourism field, (2) appropriate language level (A2–B1 according to the CEFR), (3) manageable text length between 150–250 words, and (4) authenticity and clarity for classroom use.

The treatment implementation spanned six meetings, each lasting two 45-minute sessions. The same English teacher taught both the experimental and control groups to control for instructional variability. The learning activities were structured into three phases: pre-reading (activating background knowledge and previewing vocabulary), while-reading (identifying main ideas, scanning for details, and inferring meaning), and post-reading (summarizing, role-playing, or discussing workplace relevance). Example texts included a hotel guest complaint letter, a tourism brochure for "Visit Polewali Mandar", and a job vacancy poster for a hotel receptionist (V. Cook, 1981; Kusumaningrum et al., 2019).

To ensure treatment fidelity, each session was monitored using a fidelity checklist completed by an assistant observer (Jennings, 2023; Mowbray et al., n.d.). Additionally, teacher reflections were documented after every session, and random audio recordings were reviewed to verify instructional consistency throughout the experiment.

Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest control group format. The design was chosen because random assignment of participants was not feasible within the natural classroom setting of the vocational high school. Instead, two intact classes with similar proficiency levels were selected: one as the experimental group and the other as the control group. The independent variable was the type of instructional material used: contextual, authentic materials for the experimental group and conventional textbook-based materials for the control group, while the dependent variable was the students’ reading comprehension achievement, as measured through pretest and posttest scores. This design allowed for a direct comparison of the effectiveness of contextual authentic materials in enhancing students’ reading comprehension while controlling for initial differences through pretesting and statistical adjustments. The use of a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design is widely recommended in educational research when intact classes must be maintained and random assignment is not feasible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2025).

The experiment was conducted over five weeks and consisted of three main stages: pretest, treatment, and posttest. During Week 1, both the experimental and control groups completed a reading comprehension pretest administered under identical testing conditions within a 40-minute session to establish baseline equivalence. The treatment phase, conducted from Weeks 2 to 4, involved six instructional sessions. The experimental group received instruction using contextual authentic materials, which included texts and tasks directly related to real-world hospitality contexts such as hotel advertisements, reservation forms, tourism leaflets, and guest correspondence. In contrast, the control group was taught using conventional materials based on the school’s standard English textbook, which primarily focused on general reading comprehension activities such as identifying main ideas and answering factual questions without contextual vocational relevance.

Throughout the treatment, both groups were taught by the same English teacher to minimize instructional variability and ensure that any observed differences could be attributed to the materials rather than teacher-related factors. Lesson plans were developed following the school curriculum but adapted for the authentic material in the experimental group. Each session lasted 2×45 minutes and followed a consistent pedagogical sequence: pre-reading (schema activation and vocabulary introduction), while-reading (information scanning, inference making, and comprehension monitoring), and post-reading (summarizing, role-play, and discussion).

In Week 5, both groups completed the posttest, which was a parallel form of the pretest designed to measure learning gains. The test was administered under the same conditions and time limit as the pretest to ensure comparability. This structured experimental procedure provided a reliable basis for examining how contextual authentic materials influence students’ reading comprehension and motivation in vocational English learning environments.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 following a series of statistical procedures to ensure both the accuracy and validity of the findings. First, descriptive statistics were computed to obtain the mean, standard deviation, and score distribution for each group. These descriptive measures provided an overview of students’ general performance and allowed for initial comparisons between the experimental and control groups. Prior to conducting the main inferential tests, several assumption tests were carried out to verify the suitability of the data for parametric analysis. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to examine the normality of the score distributions, while Levene’s test assessed the homogeneity of variances. Additionally, an independent-samples t-test was conducted on the pretest scores to confirm that the two groups were statistically equivalent before the treatment began, thereby ensuring that any post-intervention differences could be attributed to the instructional approach rather than pre-existing disparities.

If all assumptions for parametric testing were met, an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was performed, with the posttest scores as the dependent variable, the pretest scores as the covariate, and the instructional group (contextual authentic materials vs. conventional materials) as the independent variable. ANCOVA was chosen because it controls for initial

differences in pretest performance, thereby providing a more precise estimate of the treatment effect on students' reading comprehension. When ANCOVA assumptions were not satisfied, an independent-samples t-test on gain scores (posttest minus pretest) served as a robust alternative to maintain the validity of group comparisons (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

To assess the magnitude of the intervention effect, Cohen's *d* and partial η^2 were calculated to determine both statistical and practical significance. The significance level for all tests was set at $\alpha = 0.05$, ensuring that findings were interpreted within conventional thresholds for educational research. In cases where the data violated the normality assumption, non-parametric tests were applied—specifically, the Mann-Whitney U test for between-group comparisons and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test for within-group analyses. These alternatives are less sensitive to outliers and skewed distributions, providing reliable results under non-normal conditions. The interpretation of students' achievement in reading comprehension followed the classification criteria as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Classification of Students' Reading Comprehension Scores

Score Range	Category
70 - 84	Good
55 - 69	Fair
40 - 54	Poor
≤ 39	Very Poor

This classification system allowed the researcher to categorize students' performance more systematically and to present the findings in a clear, pedagogically meaningful way. The entire statistical procedure was conducted using SPSS version 26 to ensure consistency, reliability, and transparency of data analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented in alignment with the two research questions, namely: (1) whether contextual authentic materials significantly improved vocational students' reading comprehension, and (2) how the use of such materials influenced students' motivation toward learning English reading. The presentation of results follows the sequence of data collection, analytical procedures, and major outcomes for each research objective. Data for this study were obtained from three primary sources: (a) pretest and posttest scores measuring students' performance in four reading sub-skills identifying main ideas, recognizing supporting details, making inferences, and interpreting references; (b) classroom observations that captured learners' behavioral engagement throughout the instructional sessions; and (c) teacher reflection notes documenting students' responses, participation patterns, and motivation-related behaviors. Both the experimental group ($n = 21$) and control group ($n = 21$) completed the same test instruments under uniform conditions, thereby ensuring comparability of data across groups.

All quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics, normality testing using the Shapiro-Wilk procedure ($p > .05$), and homogeneity testing through Levene's test ($p = .37$). An independent-samples t-test on the pretest results confirmed that the two groups did not significantly differ before the intervention, $t(40) = 0.42$, $p = .674$, indicating equivalent baseline proficiency. Because all assumptions for parametric analysis were satisfied, ANCOVA was conducted using posttest scores as the dependent variable and pretest scores as the covariate. Effect sizes were calculated using both partial η^2 and Cohen's *d*. Additional t-tests were conducted to examine differences across the four reading sub-skills.

1. Improvement in Reading Comprehension

The ANCOVA revealed a significant effect of instructional treatment on reading comprehension, $F(1, 39) = 26.48$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .40$). Consistent with this finding, Cohen's *d* = 1.62 indicated a very strong practical impact of contextual authentic materials on students' learning outcomes. Table 1 illustrates the descriptive results, showing that the experimental group achieved a notable gain of 10.97 points ($SD = 3.52$) compared to a negative gain of -0.27 points ($SD = 3.12$) in the control group. Further analysis of the reading sub-skills demonstrated that students in the experimental group improved significantly across all four dimensions ($p < .01$). The most substantial improvement occurred in

inference-making ($\Delta M = +3.1$ vs. $+0.2$ in the control group), $t(40) = 4.05$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.28$. Subskills related to identifying main ideas, recognizing supporting details, and interpreting references also showed statistically meaningful gains. These results provide clear empirical evidence that contextual authentic materials enhanced students' reading comprehension more effectively than conventional textbook-based materials.

Table 2. A summary of descriptive and inferential statistics is presented below.

Group	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Gain Mean (SD)
Experimental	73.89 (6.88)	84.86 (7.12)	10.97 (3.52)
Control	74.55 (7.03)	70.56 (8.45)	-0.27 (3.12)

Note. ANCOVA, $F(1, 39) = 26.48$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .40$; Cohen's $d = 1.62$.

2. Influence on Students' Motivation

The analysis of classroom observations and teacher reflections revealed noticeable motivational enhancements among students exposed to contextual authentic materials. Learners in the experimental group demonstrated higher levels of behavioral engagement, as reflected in their increased participation, willingness to ask questions, and sustained attention during reading activities. Students also showed greater enthusiasm when interacting with authentic hospitality-related texts such as hotel advertisements, reservation forms, and tourism brochures. These materials appeared to create a sense of relevance and professional connection, prompting students to perceive English reading tasks as meaningful for their future careers. Additionally, the students displayed stronger learning autonomy; many initiated vocabulary exploration and sought additional information independently because the materials resonated with their vocational identity and real-world aspirations. Collectively, these qualitative findings suggest that the use of contextual authentic materials not only contributed to cognitive gains in reading comprehension but also fostered more positive motivational orientations toward English learning. This dual impact supports the central claim of this study that authentic, vocationally aligned materials play a crucial role in both enhancing comprehension and promoting learner engagement in vocational school settings.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the use of contextual authentic materials had a significant positive effect on the reading comprehension of vocational high school (SMK) students. This result supports the premise that exposure to authentic texts drawn from real-world vocational contexts enhances learners' cognitive engagement and comprehension processes. Students who learned through contextualized materials achieved substantially higher posttest scores than those who were taught using conventional textbooks. The results also demonstrated large effect sizes, suggesting that the intervention was not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

These results are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the benefits of authentic materials in promoting comprehension and motivation (Berardo, 2006; Gilmore, 2007; Peacock, 1997; Tomlinson, 2013). Similar to the findings of (Karimi & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Nunan, 1999), the present study confirms that authentic input enables learners to connect new information with their prior vocational knowledge, fostering deeper processing and meaningful learning. However, this study extends earlier research by providing empirical quasi-experimental evidence from the Indonesian vocational school (SMK) context, which has been underrepresented in prior literature. Few experimental or quasi-experimental studies have examined contextual authentic materials in vocational English settings (Taslimah et al., 2025), especially within hospitality and tourism programs in Indonesia.

The analysis of reading subskills offers additional insights. The greatest improvement was observed in making inferences, which aligns with (Anderson, 2010) claim that authentic texts stimulate higher-order comprehension by providing implicit cues that activate learners' schemata. Gains in identifying main ideas and recognizing supporting details support (Safaeia & Bulca, 2013) view that real-world materials help readers construct meaning hierarchically. Improvement in interpreting references indicates that authentic texts enhance learners'

awareness of cohesion and coherence, essential for professional reading tasks such as understanding manuals or workplace memos (Sambayon et al., 2023).

The observed motivational effect also aligns with findings from (Richards & Schmidt, 2013; Yan et al., 2024), who reported that authentic materials increase learner engagement and relevance. Although the present study did not include a formal motivation scale, classroom observations showed higher student participation and enthusiasm during lessons involving authentic texts, suggesting potential affective benefits. Future studies could incorporate validated motivation questionnaires to quantify these observations.

The findings underscore the pedagogical significance of incorporating contextual and authentic materials into vocational English instruction. For English teachers in SMK, these materials serve as a bridge between classroom learning and real-world workplace communication, supporting both language competence and employability skills. The results suggest that teacher training programs should emphasize materials adaptation, enabling teachers to curate authentic texts that match students' vocational fields. Curriculum developers are encouraged to include contextualized reading modules—for example, hospitality manuals, tourism advertisements, or business correspondence—to foster both comprehension and motivation. Policymakers in vocational education may consider authentic materials as a standard component of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) programs to ensure alignment with the labor market's linguistic demands.

Despite its promising results, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small ($n = 42$) and limited to one vocational school, which restricts generalizability. Second, the duration of the treatment (four weeks) may not fully capture long-term retention or transfer effects. Third, the study focused solely on cognitive reading outcomes without directly measuring affective variables such as motivation or attitudes toward English learning. Additionally, the slightly negative gain observed in the control group may reflect test fatigue or reduced engagement rather than an actual decline in ability.

Future research should address these limitations by involving a larger and more diverse sample of vocational schools across various specializations (e.g., business, engineering, maritime). Longitudinal designs are recommended to examine the sustainability of reading improvement over time. Incorporating mixed-method approaches, such as combining quantitative tests with qualitative interviews or classroom observations, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of learners' perceptions and motivation. Further, studies may compare different types of authentic materials, digital versus print, local versus global, to identify which forms are most effective for specific vocational contexts. Such extensions would contribute to a more robust theoretical and practical framework for the use of authentic materials in vocational English education. In conclusion, the findings of this study confirm that using contextual authentic materials in teaching English reading is effective in improving SMK students' reading comprehension, particularly in identifying main ideas, understanding supporting details, making inferences, and interpreting references. Moreover, such materials increase students' motivation and engagement, especially because the texts are relevant to their vocational studies and future professional contexts. This makes contextual authentic materials a valuable strategy for English teachers in vocational high schools to enhance both comprehension skills and students' readiness for real-world workplace communication.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether the use of contextual authentic materials significantly improved reading comprehension and influenced students' motivation in learning English reading among tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 2 Polewali during the 2025/2026 academic year. Forty-two students were randomly selected and divided into an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of 21 students. Over five weeks, the experimental group received instruction through contextual authentic materials such as hotel advertisements, reservation forms, menus, and tourism brochures while the control group was taught using conventional textbook-based instruction.

The results revealed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher posttest scores than the control group, indicating that the integration of authentic and contextually relevant materials enhanced students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, qualitative feedback and classroom observations highlighted that students in the experimental group demonstrated greater participation, enthusiasm, and confidence in engaging with reading tasks. These students also expressed that the materials helped them connect English learning with their prospective hospitality careers, thereby increasing their intrinsic motivation.

In conclusion, the use of contextual authentic materials effectively bridges the gap between academic learning and real-world professional practice. English teachers in vocational settings are strongly encouraged to utilize such materials to promote not only linguistic competence but also a sense of relevance, engagement, and long-term motivation in English language learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher would like to thank the teachers and students of SMK Negeri 2 Polewali who were actively involved in supporting this research process. Their cooperation, enthusiasm, and commitment during data collection and classroom implementation were instrumental in ensuring the smooth progress of this study. The researcher also expresses sincere gratitude to Institut Agama Islam DDI Pangkajene Sidenreng Rappang for the academic guidance, valuable feedback, and continuous encouragement provided throughout the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the English language education department for providing scholarly resources and a supportive research environment. The contributions and support from both institutions were invaluable in the successful completion of this article and in advancing the study of English teaching practices in vocational education contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

It has contributed a lot to the completion of this article, starting from background analysis, developing theories, data collection, data analysis, and writing a full article. A, SY, and JC contributed to checking the data and provided an evaluation of the content of this article.

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